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The President's Daily Brief

December 28, 1974

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THAILAND

The unexpected return of former prime minister Field Marshal Thanom to Bangkok has presented Prime Minister Sanya's caretaker government with a potentially explosive political problem. In an attempt to divert expected popular outbursts--particularly from students--against Thanom's return, the government has placed the former prime minister under house arrest pending an investigation of his role in events leading to the riots that toppled his regime in October 1973.

Thanom claims to have come back to visit his dying father. [redacted] It is possible, however, that his arrival was deliberately timed to coincide with the absence from the country of army commander Krit Siwara. Krit, who has been quietly attempting to remove proteges of the former prime minister from prominent positions within the armed forces, would see Thanom's presence as a potential threat to his own influence over the military. Krit, now on a five-nation swing through Southeast Asia, has been asked by the cabinet to cut his trip short and come back to Bangkok.

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No matter how firmly the government handles the situation, Thanom's return is sure to revive the relatively dormant student movement. Police do not expect any major protest, however, for at least 24 hours. The announcement of Thanom's arrest may buy more time for the government to gauge public opinion before it decides how to proceed. Complicating the government's problem are the parliamentary elections scheduled for next month.

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